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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PEACEKEEPING FORCE FORMALLY LAUNCHED

¶1. (U) Summary: In the first of what will reportedly be weekly press conferences, on June 22 the initial phase of the European Union election support/peacekeeping operation force was formally introduced by Aldo Ajello, EU Special Rep to the Great Lakes, and Gen. Karlheinz Viereck (Germany), commander of the EUFOR operations. Despite sometimes confrontational questions from the Congolese press, Ajello and Viereck both emphasized the limited role of EUFOR and the responsibility of the GDRC itself for securing the upcoming elections. End summary.

¶2. (U) Ajello and Viereck both emphasized that the EUFOR is a supplemental mission specifically mandated to support MONUC forces in keeping the peace and support the Congolese people during the election and post-election period. The mission is expected to be fully operational by July 29 and has an initial mandate of four months. The operational headquarters will be in Potsdam, Germany, with 800 troops stationed in Kinshasa and a 1,200 man "strategic rapid reaction force" stationed in Gabon. In Kinshasa, EUFOR's main tactical base will be at Ndolo airport (about 15 minutes from downtown Kinshasa), with another unit stationed at Ndjili airport (about 45 minutes from downtown Kinshasa) to assist with logistics.

¶3. (SBU) In response to specific questions from the press, both Ajello and Viereck noted that EUFOR was the 4th-tier response unit, following (in order) the Congolese National Police, then specially-trained FARDC units (such as the integrated brigades), then MONUC. Both also emphasized that EUFOR's presence did not represent any failures by MONUC, but instead demonstrated the EU's commitment to the DRC's -- and ultimately Africa's -- success in emerging from conflict and moving towards stability. Several reporters questioned when and in what circumstances EUFOR troops might be deployed to other areas, such as eastern Congo or Katanga province. Ajello and Viereck repeated that the troops would be deployed in Kinshasa and that the mission was designed as support of MONUC, and not as an alternative or a replacement for the MONUC presence. The EUFOR representatives insisted that they were not here to evacuate Europeans or expatriates -- despite comments to the contrary recently published in the German press.

¶4. (SBU) During a separate briefing provided to CIAT members on June 22, Viereck confirmed that EUFOR would not be sending out street patrols, since the operation does not have a mandate for providing day-to-day security. However, Viereck indicated that EUFOR members will be visible throughout the Kinshasa area due to their efforts to familiarize themselves with the city and to participate in selected humanitarian projects. During the same briefing, Viereck reported that

EUFOR will be prepared to rescue people who experience trouble in the course and scope of their election activities, with the rescue mandate limited to neither European citizens nor the Kinshasa area. In fact, if a CEI official or elections observer was seized or surrounded, even in an outlying area, EUFOR would apparently consider it within its mandate to rescue the individual -- with the usual provisos of coordination with Congolese authorities and MONUC.

15. (SBU) Comment. The emphasis on the limitations of the mission may reflect German angst that German troops are in the DRC at all. In addition, the representatives seemed to be deliberately lowering expectations as to what EUFOR could actually accomplish here, given that forces will only be present in the Kinshasa area. It is likely that EUFOR's greatest value is, as alluded in the press conference, symbolic -- a visible reminder that the EU wants to help the Congolese help themselves to maintain equilibrium during elections. End comment.

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